

The Nathan Bequest: Payment Receipts in the Hand of Johann Sebastian Bach, 1746 to 1748 (With a Fragment for the Year 1749 in the Hand of His Son)

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Among Johann Sebastian Bach's duties as Thomas Cantor in Leipzig was the obligation to lead the choirboys of the Thomasschule in annual renditions of motets or chorales offered in memory of benefactors of the school. In some twenty instances the terms of the bequest governing these performances entailed an honorarium for the cantor, who dutifully prepared and signed a receipt confirming its payment.¹

The most copiously documented of these obligations was the so-called Nathan Bequest (Nathanisches Legat). Sabine Nathan, evidently the wealthy widow of a Leipzig master cabinetmaker, died in 1612. Her last will and testament provided that each year, on or about Sabina's Day (i.e., October 26), funeral motets were to be performed before and after the weekly sermon in the appropriate church: either St. Thomas or St. Nikolai. For this purpose the widow earmarked the sum of 1000 gulden, from whose annual interest five gulden were to be shared by the cantor (two gulden) and the participating choirboys (three gulden). The bequest was to be administered by the Leipzig cabinetmakers' guild.²

Between 1686 and 1821 receipts for these payments were entered into a leather-backed, bound receipt book belonging to the guild. Since Bach assumed the post of Thomas Cantor in May 1723 and retained it until his death in July 1750, we may presume that (whenever possible) he personally drafted and signed all the receipts for the Nathan bequest falling within that twenty-seven-year period. In fact, sixteen-and-a-half annual receipts survive, as does the receipt book itself.³ The book proper contains Bach's entries only for the years 1727-1729; the other pertinent leaves were removed from the volume--in order, no doubt, to be sold (or perhaps given away) to collectors.

Abbruchte hat der Hof Inspector
Eulenberg vor d. Jahr 1746. wegen
des Nathanielsen Legati, so den 26.
Octobr. unmittelbar in der Thron
abgang Sabina in der Thron
abgang worden, eine gewisse Anzahl
indem der Hüft gültig Maßen
auswendig benutzet richtig gemacht,
so als laut des Testaments unter dem
selbigen Tag in Gese besindlich, die
vor richtig und egal abgetheilt
worden. S. 27. Octobr.
1746. Joh: Seb: Bach

Abbruchte hat der Könige Inspector
H. Paul. Franko vor d. Jahr 1747.
wegen des Nathanielsen Legati, so den
26. Octobr. unmittelbar in der Thron
abgang Sabina, wie in der Thron
abgang worden, eine gewisse Anzahl
indem der Hüft gültig Maßen
auswendig benutzet richtig gemacht, so
als laut Testaments unter dem selbigen
Tag in Gese besindlich, die
egal abgetheilt worden. S. 27. Octobr.
1747. Joh: Seb: Bach

Dass der Inspector des Natha
nielsen Legati, Herr Eulenberg
am 17. d. d. 1748. Jahr, dass
sind auf d. Tabing Berg in Monat
Octobr. abgegangen Thron abgang,
vor demselben eine gewisse Anzahl
indem der Hüft gültig Maßen
auswendig benutzet richtig gemacht,
so als laut des Testaments unter dem
selbigen Tag in Gese besindlich, die
egal abgetheilt worden. S. 27. Octobr.
1748. Joh: Seb: Bach

Vom Inspector des Nathanielsen
Legati, Herr Eulenberg am 17. d. d.
1749. Jahr, wegen eines d. d. in
Tabing Berg in Monat Octobr.
abgegangen Thron abgang, vor dem
selbigen eine gewisse Anzahl
indem der Hüft gültig Maßen
auswendig benutzet richtig gemacht,
so als laut des Testaments unter dem
selbigen Tag in Gese besindlich, die
egal abgetheilt worden. S. 27. Octobr.
1749. Joh: Seb: Bach

A single leaf typically contains three or, space permitting, four annual entries. In the latter case, two successive years are entered on each side, one above the other and separated from one another by a freely drawn horizontal line. In all, surviving single leaves from the receipt book include Bach's entries for the years 1723-1726, 1735, 1737, 1742-1748, along with the nonautograph fragmentary entry for the year 1749 (see below).⁴

The last four receipts from Bach's Leipzig tenure, for the years 1746 to 1749, are contained on the single leaf now preserved in the Library of Congress. In all four Bach acknowledges receiving the sum of five gulden from the designated inspector of the cabinet makers' guild. Beginning with the payment for the year 1744 this function was usually carried out by the master cabinetmaker, Christoph Eulenberg (1692-1755).⁵ In the year 1745, however, the inspector was one Johann Bode and in 1747 a certain Paul Francke.

The Library of Congress leaf measures approximately 15.6 by 9.6 cm. and is in good condition. Its provenance has been traced by Gerhard Herz.⁶ The leaf was purchased by the Frankfurt collector Louis Koch (1862-1930), directly or indirectly from the original owner, the Leipzig cabinetmakers' guild. As part of the Koch collection it was bequeathed by Koch's daughter, Maria Floersheim-Koch, to her son, Georg Floersheim. The leaf was purchased from the Floersheim Collection by the Moldenhauer Archives, in December 1976.⁷

Bach's receipts for 1746 and 1747 are on the recto of the leaf, his entry for 1748 on the top of the verso. Below it is the beginning of the receipt for the year 1749; it is in the hand of his son, Johann Christian Bach, who was fourteen years old at the time.⁸ Bach was evidently unable, owing to his failing health and eyesight, to write the entry himself. Indeed, Bach's handwriting had already deteriorated considerably at the time of the 1748 receipt. With the exception of the date, Christian set out to copy the 1748 receipt literally. It was almost certainly completed on the following leaf. Whether or not Johann Sebastian Bach signed it himself is not known.

Two of the four entries on the Library of Congress leaf have been published previously. A transcription of the receipt for 1746 appears in *Bach-Dokumente I*; the receipt for 1748 has been transcribed and translated into English by Gerhard Herz in *Bach Sources in America*. The 1747 version, along with the portion of the receipt for 1749, copied by Johann Christian Bach, have not been transcribed

or translated before. The texts for all four years, in transcription and English translation, follow herewith.

Receipt for the Year 1746 (recto, top).⁹

Abermahln hat der Herr *Inspector* Eülenberg vor das Jahr 1746., wegen des *Nathanischen Legati*, so den 26. *Octobr.* vermittelst eines Sterbe Liedes als am Tage *Sabinæ* in der Kirche abgesungen worden, eine Genüge gethan, indem Er fünff Gulden Meißnisch mir endes benandten richtig gezahlet; so auch laut des *Testaments* unter die selbigen Tages im *Chore* befindlichen Schüler richtig und *egal* ausgetheilet werden sollen. Leipzig. den 26. *Octobr.* 1746.

Joh: Seb: Bach

Once again Inspector Eülenberg has fulfilled the obligation of the Nathan bequest, [this time] for the year 1746, insofar as he has properly paid to the undersigned five Meissen gulden in compensation for the singing of a dirge in the church on the 26th of October, i.e., on Sabina Day, which payment, in accordance with the will, is to be equally and properly divided among the pupils who were present in the choir on that day. Leipzig, the 26th of October 1746.

Joh: Seb: Bach

Receipt for the Year 1747 (recto, bottom).

Wiederum hat der heurige *Inspector* Herr Paul Francke vor das Jahr 1747, wegen des *Nathanischen Legati*, so den 26. *Octobr.* vermittelst eines Sterbe Liedes, als am *Sabinen* Tag in der *Thomas* Kirche abgesungen worden, eine völlige Genüge gethan, indem Er fünff Gulden Meißnisch mir endes benandten richtig gezahlet, so auch laut *Testamenti* unter die selbigen Tages im *Chore* befindliche[n] Schüler richtig und *egal* ausgetheilet werden soll[en]. Leipzig. den 25. *Octobr.* 1747.

Joh: Sebast: Bach.

Once again, the current inspector, Mr. Paul Francke, has completely fulfilled the obligation of the Nathan bequest [this time] for the year 1747, insofar as he has properly paid to the undersigned five Meissen gulden in compensation for the singing of a dirge in the Thomas Church on the 26th of October, i.e., on Sabina Day, which payment, in accordance with the will is to be equally and properly divided among the pupils who were present in the choir on that day. Leipzig, the 25th of October 1747.

Joh: Sebast: Bach.

Receipt for the Year 1748 (verso, top).¹⁰

Daß der *Inspector* des *Nathanischen Legati*, Herr Eülenberg auch vor das 1748. Jahr., wegen eines auf den Sabinen Tag in *Monat Octobris* abgesungenen Sterbe Liedes, vor dießes mahl ein Genüge gethan, sindemahln derselbe heute *dato* fünff Gulden Meißn[isch], nämlich. 2 vor den *Cantorem*, und 3 vor die Schüler mir endes benandten ausgezahlet; solches wird hiedurch danckbarlich *quittiret*. Leipzig. den 27. *Octobr.* 1748.

Joh: Sebast: Bach

C.

That the Inspector of the Nathan bequest, Mr. Eülenberg, in compensation for the singing of a dirge on Sabina Day in the month of October, has once again fulfilled the obligation, this time for the year 1748, insofar as he has paid to the undersigned on this day five Meissen gulden--namely, 2 for the Cantor and 3 for the pupils--such is hereby gratefully acknowledged. Leipzig, the 27th of October 1748.

Joh: Sebast: Bach

Receipt for the Year 1749: Fragment in the Hand of Johann Christian Bach (verso, bottom).

Daß der *Inspector* des *Nathanischen Legati*, Herr Eülenberg auch vor das 1749 Jahr, wegen eines auf den Sabinen Tag in Monath *Octobris* abgesungenen Sterbelieder [sic], vor dießes Mahl ein Genüge gethan, sinde[mahln]

That the Inspector of the Nathan bequest, Mr. Eülenberg, in compensation for the singing of a dirges [sic] on Sabina Day in the month of October, has once again fulfilled the obligation, this time for the year 1749, insofar

[End of fragment]

¹ See Hans-Joachim Schulze, "Marginalien zu einigen Bach-Dokumenten," *Bach-Jahrbuch 1961* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel), especially pp. 88ff.

² This paragraph is based on the discussion in Werner Neumann and Hans-Joachim Schulze, eds., *Bach-Dokumente, Band I: Schriftstücke von der Hand Johann Sebastian Bachs* (hereafter *Bach-Dokumente I*) (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1963), p. 192.

³ From 1951 until 1993 the volume was in the possession of Dr. Otto Kallir. See Gerhard Herz, *Bach Sources in America* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1984), p. 161. In 1993 it was acquired at auction from Sotheby's, London, by the Bach-Archiv, Leipzig. See Hans-Joachim Schulze, "Johann Sebastian Bach und das 'Nathanische Legat'" in *Bach-Archiv Leipzig, Das Quittungsbuch des Nathanischen Legats* (Berlin: Kulturstiftung der Länder, n.d. [1995]), pp. 11-12.

⁴ The receipts for the years 1723 to 1726 are published in Hans-Joachim Schulze, "Vier unbekannte Quittungen J. S. Bachs und ein Briefauszug Jacob von Stählin's," *Bach-Jahrbuch 1973*, pp. 88-89; the receipt for the year 1748, along with an English translation is published in Herz, op. cit., pp. 164-65; the receipts for the years 1746, 1747, and 1749, along with English translations, are published below. The receipts for the remaining years are published in *Bach-Dokumente I*, pp. 192-93, 196-97, 200-203.

⁵ *Bach-Dokumente I*, p. 202.

⁶ Herz op. cit., pp. 163-64.

⁷ During the period that the leaf was in the possession of Georg Floersheim until its acquisition by the Moldenhauer Archives it was unavailable for scholarly examination or reproduction--hence the absence of the texts for the years 1747 to 1749 from the definitive *Bach-Dokumente I*. See the discussion there of documents 133, 139, 143 (pp. 205, 208-9); also Herz, op. cit., pp.163-64.

⁸*Bach-Dokumente I*, p. 209.

⁹ Transcribed in *Bach-Dokumente I* as document 129 (p. 203).

¹⁰ As transcribed and translated in Herz op. cit., p. 164. A facsimile of the verso appears in Herz, op. cit., p. 376, illus. 62.